



# Office of Surface Mining

Since 1977, protecting the environment during coal mining and reclaiming the land after coal is removed have been required by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. In cooperation with States and Tribes, the Office of Surface Mining (OSM) has the responsibility to make sure those requirements are met. OSM is organized around the two principal requirements of the surface mining law -- protecting the environment during active coal mining and restoring abandoned mines.

Since May 3, 1978, all surface coal mines must have permits and comply with either OSM's Federal programs or approved state programs. Where states are the primary regulators, they administer and enforce surface coal mining and reclamation. Currently, there are 24 states with regulatory programs. Twenty-four states and three Indian tribes have approved Abandoned Mine Land programs.

The Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation Program restores lands mined and abandoned or left inadequately restored before August 3, 1977. Situations of danger to public

health, safety and general welfare are given priority. Coal producers pay fees of 35 cents per ton of surface mined coal, 15 cents per ton of coal mined underground, and 10 cents per ton of lignite, which are deposited in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund. Appropriations from this fund are used to make grants to States and Tribes for the reclamation costs of abandoned mine lands and to fund OSM cleanup projects on Federal and non-Federal lands.

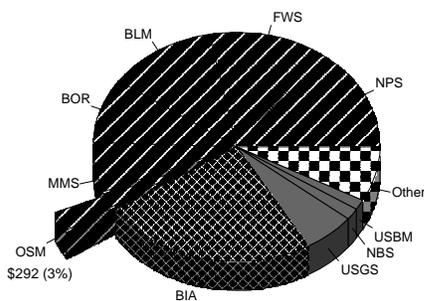
*"The greatest domestic problem facing our country is saving our soil and water. Our soil belongs also to unborn generations."*  
Sam Rayburn, 1956

## APPALACHIAN CLEAN STREAMS INITIATIVE

The Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative is an inter-agency effort led by the Office of Surface Mining to address the number one water problem in Appalachia - acid mine drainage. Over the past few years, the public has become more committed to the restoration of streams and watersheds degraded by acid/toxic mine drainage, the product of decades of coal mining. Various private and public coalitions have formed to focus funding and technical resources toward cleanup of selected streams of high interest to the citizens and state governments. Responding to these expressions of public and state priorities, OSM created the Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative as a focal point for action in this arena. Twelve stream cleanup projects in eight states have been selected and preliminary planning has been completed. Over 7,000 miles of polluted streams need to be restored to productive use. Not only will the water supplies of the coal field communities be improved, their local economies will benefit from increased tourism and recreational activities.

Figure 17

1995 Office of Surface Mining Budget Authority (\$ in millions)



Total DOI Budget Authority - \$9,744 million

## **FOSTERING OPEN COMMUNICATION**

In today's world, effective communication is vital to the success of any organization. The Office of Surface Mining, with its broad and diverse customer groups including citizens, state regulators, the coal industry, and interest groups, achieved several important successes in 1995.

■ **The Applicant Violator System was opened to the public.** System training was provided in Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Lexington, Kentucky. Public access allows coal companies and other interested parties to monitor records that could affect the issuance of permits, while enabling OSM to build a more open permit approval process.

■ **The COALEX computer data base was opened to the public.** This data base contains the full text of the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act and all Office of Surface Mining regulations (both past and current). Computer access to this data supports more substantive public participation while providing equal access to key data for all parties affected by the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act.

■ **A new advisory notice format was initiated.** A violent eruption, or blowout, caused by pressurized water inside an underground coal mine killed a young woman in West Virginia. To alert the coal industry to this hazard, Director Robert Uram issued an advisory to state, regional and national coal mining associations describing deadly mine blowout hazards and asked for their cooperation in safeguarding the public from these dangers. This was the first time an advisory format had been used by the Office of Surface Mining. It provided a quick, effective way to get this important message to everyone across the country who had knowledge of mines that could contain



*OSM Reclamation Specialist Jack Simpson examines rich topsoil being spread over a reclaimed area of an Illinois mine. Topsoil removal and handling are critical in the Midwest, where prime farmland must be restored to its pre-mining level of productivity. Photo credit - Chuck Meyers.*

similar safety hazards.

## **INITIATIVES**

In 1995, significant success was achieved on agency initiatives dealing with acid mine drainage, electronic permitting, shared oversight, clean streams, and remining. An acid mine drainage summit was planned to bring experts from all parts of the country together to focus on acid mine drainage prevention. The Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative was the catalyst responsible for bringing diverse public and private entities together to work on improving on-the-ground conditions in acid-polluted streams. Electronic permitting moved from the testing to the application stage, with significant savings in efficiency. The oversight process was re-engineered and the new shared process will fully implemented in 1996. Also, the *Remining For Real!* initiative was started, and the first site-specific case to eliminate regulatory barriers to remining began at a proposed mine site in Virginia.

## **REGULATION OF MINING AND RECLAMATION**

Major 1995 accomplishments were achieved in three areas:

■ ***The Office of Surface Mining, in cooperation with its partner states and tribes, revised its oversight policy to focus on results.*** The new policy incorporates result-based oversight founded upon performance agreements worked out by consensus with each partner. As a result of this initiative, States and Indian Tribes are less encumbered by OSM reviews and involvement and thus better able to run their own programs. The result is more efficient programs and savings of administrative costs - savings that are used for better environmental protection and reclamation throughout the coal fields of the nation. Program evaluation now focuses on identifying the financial, technical, and other assistance States need in order to strengthen their programs and no longer duplicates State program responsibilities.

■ ***Indian lands programs began to move toward primacy.*** The Office of Surface Mining and the coal resource Indian Tribes formulated a plan that will enable additional tribes to serve as the primary regulator of mining activities on their lands.

■ ***New rules were promulgated to fulfill the congressional mandate to help states protect private property from damage by underground coal mines.*** These rules fill a gap in the previous subsidence rules by requiring coal operators to protect the homes, churches, and other buildings as well as water supplies of coalfield residents from damage caused by underground coal mining.



*This Ohio Christmas tree farm was established on a former coal mine site. Trees from the farm have been established for use in the National Christmas Pageant of Peace. Photo credit - Chuck Meyers.*

## **TECHNICAL TRAINING**

The technical training program has been consistently cited by customers as a model of Federal, State, Tribal and private cooperation and as an outstanding means of providing technical assistance. All courses are developed by teams of State and Federal personnel and are based on customer surveys. During 1995, over 1,000 participants attended 62 training sessions offered for 24 courses. State and Tribal representatives accounted for 73 percent of program attendance, OSM personnel 22 percent, and private attendance totaled 5 percent. The 1995 program represented a 25 percent increase in program offerings and services over 1994. The program worked cooperatively with States and Tribes to maintain low costs which allowed an increase in offerings without increasing the program budget over the previous year. Increases were made directly in response to the demand of State, Tribal, and OSM customers. For example, at the request of the State of Oklahoma, eight course sessions were held in Oklahoma to meet special programmatic needs. Additionally, as part of the Indonesia Program which is

funded by the World Bank, Indonesian students attended courses in the United States and Indonesia.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE**

The Office of Surface Mining developed its customer performance standards in 1994. During fiscal year 1995, a survey was conducted to further identify OSM’s customer base and its perceptions and needs. The survey provided summary information concerning (1) the dissemination of information, (2) products and service delivery, (3) quality of service, and (4) suggestions for improvement.

Fiscal year 1995 accomplishments include the following:

<u>Abandoned Mined Land Emergency Complaints</u> -- complaints were addressed within the allotted time frame:	95%
<u>Applicant Violator System</u> -- requested information was received within the allotted time frame:	97%
<u>Wilkes-Barre and Pittsburgh Mine Map Offices</u> -- customer requests for materials were provided in the allotted time frame:	97%
<u>State Program</u> -- State Program amendments were announced in the allotted time frame:	97%

Figure 18

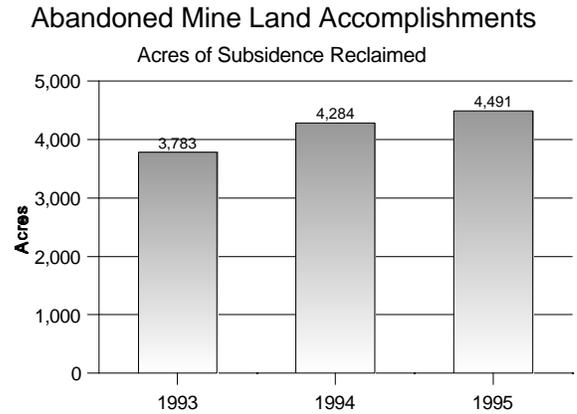


Figure 19

